

Eat your greens

Research suggests that the chlorophyll and other nutrients in greens—grasses, algae, seaweed and regular green vegetables—may aid detoxification. Many plant-based nutrients are natural chelators, drawing heavy metals from the body (Townsend Lett Docs, 1999; 192: 82–91).

However, much of the evidence comes from animal studies, so we still don't know exactly how such substances actually behave in humans. There are no published human studies on the detox benefits of sprouted grass, for example, and the animal studies show mixed results in its ability to protect rats and mice exposed to benzo(a)pyrene from developing cancer (Mutat Res, 1988; 206: 221–5; Neoplasma, 1988; 35: 515–23).

In fact, much of what is claimed for sprouted grasses is drawn from studies of other types of greens, such as dark-green leafy and cruciferous vegetables. Green (and yellow) vegetables are rich in antioxidant carotenoids, shown to prevent a number of age-related diseases, including macular degeneration and cataracts (Br J Ophthalmol, 1998; 82: 907–10; Am J Clin Nutr, 1999; 70: 431, 509, 517) and many types of cancer (Pharmacol Toxicol, 1993; 72: 116–35; J Natl Cancer Inst, 1999; 91: 547–56, 2102–6; Cancer, 1999; 86: 1783–92; J Natl Cancer Inst, 2000; 92: 61–8; Int J Cancer, 2002; 97: 365–71).

Seaweeds and alginates may also bind to heavy metals. *Chlorella* algae can draw persistent chemicals such as PCBs out of the system (J Nutr, 1999; 129: 1731–6). Similarly, Arctic seaweeds can aid detoxification (Environ Res, 1977; 14: 28–40; Can Med Assoc J, 1968; 98: 1179–82; Can Med Assoc J, 1964; 91: 285–8).

from your diet and environment may be just as effective as ingesting herbs and supplements.

A good diet may also be protective. Garlic and onions, as well as in chives, leeks and shallots, contain sulphur compounds such as allicin, allyl sulphides and allyl mercaptocysteine, and are also potent antioxidants. Garlic and onions, like their cruciferous relatives, also reduce toxic byproducts (Chem Res Toxicol, 1991; 4: 642–7).

Green tea is also a proven protective and detoxifying agent (Food Chem Toxicol, 1995; 33: 27–30; J Agric Food Chem, 2002; 50: 2418–22; Alt Med Rev, 1999; 4: 360–70). Fibre is thought to benefit detox as it binds to toxins and aids their removal. Insoluble fibre, such as psyllium, may thus benefit a programme of detox. Flaxseeds ground and added to food may have a similar action.

In addition, most modern toxins such as metals, hydrocarbons and VOCs are lipophilic—they like to be surrounded by fat. A five-, 10- or even 28-day detox plan is unlikely to unlock these fat-stored toxins to any large degree. Instead, it will most likely deal with circulating toxins in blood and the gut, the ones that make up the minority in most bodies. Longer-term detox with a programme of weight loss is the best way to deal with most toxins.

Finally, whatever the type of detox you engage in, it is always best to do so under the guidance of a qualified therapist.

The products

Detoxification, when overseen by a qualified practitioner, usually involves: 1) elimination of toxins; 2) repair of damage to the

gut or other organs; and 3) changing the diet and lifestyle to prevent the reintroduction of toxins and maintain its elimination.

On this basis, the detox in a box from a healthfood shop only addresses step 1 of a detox regime. However, the question is, are some more effective than others?

Around half the products in our road test are intended to be diluted in water and drunk throughout the day. These encourage the user to drink at least one litre of water daily. The obvious and largely unanswerable question is, is it the herbal mixture or the water that aids the body the most?

Also, bear in mind that most detox plans pander to the Western sweet tooth. The most popular liquids are fruit juice-based whereas, for detox, it is seaweed, kelp and green—sometimes grassy-tasting—foods that pack the most punch.

The products ranged in price from the sublime at 20 p/day to the ridiculous at £4.33/day. Nevertheless, as detox is something you may only do twice a year, efficacy, not price, may be your main consideration. For this reason, we gave more weight to the ingredients—is there any evidence that they work, do they include unnecessary fillers and are they organic?

Only three (Pure Plan, Seagreens and Ephytem) include organic ingredients. Since getting rid of toxic chemicals is the goal of detox, including herbs that may have been exposed to pesticides seems to defeat the purpose, as is the use of preservatives, additives and inert ingredients. In rating these products, we took all of these things into consideration to arrive at our final assessment.

BIOFIRM

Distributor: New Nordic

Price: £19.95 for 90 tablets

Rating: ⓄⓄⓄⓄ

Ingredients: chicory root, citrus fruit pulp, nettle, dandelion, citrus fibres, psyllium, asparagus, globe artichoke, celery seed, and thyme. **Suggested use:** 2 tablets in a large glass of water 3 times daily for a minimum of 2 weeks

A favourite of women's magazines throughout the land, there is no need to fast with BioFirm, but New Nordic suggests you reduce or eliminate alcohol, coffee, sweets, sugar, red meat and fatty foods, and take moderate exercise to stimulate circulation, respiration and elimination of toxins from your body. The manufacturer promotes the citrus-fruit pulp and pectin in the product, as the latter is thought to help in binding toxins. The tablets also contain useful fibre and FOS to support the gut, and diuretic herbs to aid elimination. A two-week regime costs £1.33/day. All in all, this is not a bad supplement.

SEAGREENS AMALGAM DETOX CAPSULES

Distributor: Oceans of Goodness

(01444 400 403)

Price: £12.75 for 60 capsules

Rating: ⓄⓄⓄⓄ

Ingredients: 100 per cent organic Arctic wrack. **Suggested use:** 2 capsules in the morning and 1 in the evening for 3 weeks, then 1–2 a day

We were impressed by this product's simplicity and the focused nature of its use. Most people who detox have no idea what they're trying to achieve. Seagreens can help remove heavy metals from the body, based on research (see box above). Wrack is also organic as is Oceans' assurance that their wrack has half the iodine content of other kelps, putting less stress on the thyroid. As greens can aid the release of toxins, consider taking liver-support therapies alongside this product. This costs around 64 p/day.

DETOX FORMULA

Distributor: Health Sense Nutrition

Price: £11.99 for 120 tablets

Rating: ⓄⓄⓄ

Ingredients: milk thistle, dandelion, artichoke, golden seal. **Suggested use:** 2 tablets per day with meals

Anyone who has done their homework will recognise the value of this simple mix of herbs. Milk thistle is liver-supportive, dandelion is diuretic, artichoke is a source of fibre and FOS. The only concern is that golden seal, a powerful antimicrobial, may kill good as well as bad gut bacteria. But